THE MEASURE
A JOURNAL OF POETRY

Poems by Joseph Auslander, Raymond Holden, John Masefield, Louise Bogan, Carolyn Hall, Virginia Woods Mackall - - - - - - -

"Contemporary German Poetry" and "Carolina Chansons" Reviewed - - - - - - -

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Moon-Cattle

BEAUTIFUL it is to watch the mist drift in
Just so far:
A wall of steaming steady silver with the thin
Blue pallor of paraffin;
And where that ghostly rampart ends, the wheel
Of the lumbering moon, the vehement steel
Of one metallic star.

Belled brooding cattle loom enormously
In silhouette—
Moon-mottled moon-bewildered wizardry
Of alien bulk, with wet
Vaporous flanks, lungs charged with silver, browsing
Mist and chilled white shadow, drowsing
Like phantoms in a net.

Beautiful it is as death is beautiful,
Pale hieroglyph
Such as Assyrian scribes to the Sacred Bull
On a slab of silvered cliff
Might have contrived mysteriously . . . . O if my words
Were death-drenched! Mist and moon and star and herds
Might live then . . . if . . . if . . . !

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Dead Love

I HAVE betrayed you: I have failed to keep
Profundity of sleep;
I am supposed to have been laid below
The bottom of death—and now it is not so.
I am Dead Love, and yet you weep
I know.

There was a woman once who thought she knew
True love from love not true;
And a man once (May Eros pity both!)
Who put his lips to the terror of the cloth
Of love, when from it soundlessly there drew
A moth!

Jezebel

RELEASE the radiant trouble of the drum,
The oriental arteries of fire
Bleeding out of the flute: and let death come
With the sound of sullen wire.

I have sucked agony like a drowsy scum
Up from the deadening of all desire:
Now this poor Jezebel of Byzantium
Is tired . . . All things tire.

—*Joseph Auslander*

Many Waters

WATERS are many.
King or fool,
Can you capture any?

There's a pool
Hiding in weedy grass
Catching the skirts of heavens as they pass,
A frightened pool of silver, stayed with sand,
That will cling, brooding, to a gentle hand;

But at the faintest sound
Of king or fool around
Disappears under the ground!

Waters are many,
Fool or king,
Can you follow any?

There's a spring
Stirring in heavy shadows,
Moving softly through maternal meadows,
Gathering courage of a river, lest
It trouble final stars upon its breast;

But at a king's motion
Or a fool's notion
Dives headlong in the ocean!

Waters are many.
King—fool—tell!
Can you drown in any?

There's a well
Deeper than wisdom's own,
Sunk fathoms underground in ancient stone,
A well where tears and suns have died unnumbered,
In whose repose a maddened moon has slumbered.

Let a king try to find it,
Or fool creep up behind it—
And green sod will blind it.

—Virginia Woods Mackall

Cobwebbed Trapeze Performer

SHE was such a proud lady, looking from her picture,
That I hung her in the barn as a hermit's fixture,
Where the beams were lofty and the spaces wide,
With the swinging spiders to weave across her pride.

—Prescott Hoard.

The Etcher

THE Etcher must pour paraffin of dreams;
Of purple mornings and of opal sky;
Of glamorous hills and ropes of white-flamed streams
Across the glass of years and let it dry.
The Etcher must have eager restless hands
And eyes that know the perfect curve and line:
I am an etcher, for the dawn-cooled sands
Curved gently by a god, a rigid pine
Are in my soul; I know the shade and light
Of faces that I love beyond all thought;
I know the curve of breast, the line of white
That shapes a forehead. Restlessly I wrought
An etching, and the acid of despair
Gnawed on the glass and left a great love there.

—Benjamin Rosenbaum.

Though Almost Anything

THOUGH all should rise that now are laid
Among the thoroughfares of ants,
Should shake the crumbling and the shade
As a wind shakes the gowns of plants
And stand in streamy cloaks of loam
About the wood which is their home,
I feel that I should say to her
Who ran to tell me of this thing,
With breasts aquiver and parted lips
And swiftness in her arms and hips,
'Be still! No miracles occur!
'These are but rumors which you bring!'
Yet I feel that she, like a maple seed,
Would hurry on and out of sight
Leaving my dignity and deed
To drown in warm eddies of her flight.

Escape

TOO late for life I catch a train
With paper money in my pocket
And paper wisdom in my brain.
I ride a many-windowed rocket
And there is frost upon the pane—
Print of many a snow-flake toe
Stamping me hidden as I go.
Come of your breathing is this frost,—
You whom I pronounce a ghost
Or, if Wintrier truth be told,
A wind-drowned heel-crunch in the cold.

To Nine
Who Vanished Long Ago

O, beautiful, wind-blown,
Compassionate young nine!
Upon what fire-forged stone,
By what sun-kindled pine
Should kneel this body of mine?

From silver-silled long nights,
From prismed webs of dew,
From valleys and blown heights
I have cried out for you
As Beauty bade me do.

How, how shall I fall
As leaves fall to a dust
That takes and tries them all?
How shall this being trust
Its range to the world's crust?

O, dead, deep-buried Girls
Sunk now to the fierce core
Wherefrom the soul's fire whirls,
How shall I suffer more
With none to suffer for?

O, beautiful, wind-blown,
Unanswering dear Nine!
Upon what brutal stone
Beneath what heedless pine
Shall I fling this body of mine?

In the still-chambered night
My heart gives tears to eyes
That ache for absent light,
Knowing, magician-wise
That sunk suns may not rise,

Nor with them the conceived
Sweet ministers to minds
Which now are interleaved
With waters and with winds
Where more than darkness blinds.

O, you who once deferred
The tragic fall of pain
Inevitable, who heard
The sad sweep of that rain
Which nourished man's first brain,

You who gave speech to men's
Far-fathoming strange gift,
Look now through the sharp lens
Of eyes that wetly lift
Toward storm too deep to rift!

Look! Look! This troubled soul!
This water in the eyes!
Lift up the broken bowl
And scatter to the skies
These drops which life denies!

Oh, vanished, vivid, Friends!
In what wind-raftered hollow
Under this sky that bends
With weight of sun and swallow
Lie the lost limbs I follow?

I—the infirm old child
Of a still-eager womb!
A ghost, among things piled
Like walls that make a tomb,
Haunting remembered bloom.

—*Raymond Holden.*

In a Theatre

AFTER the traffic with its roars and glares
One treads in dimness upon velvet stairs
Into a dark where women strip the sheets
(That gleam a moment) from the velvet seats.

* *

Stilly they work, then go; the doors creak, then
Two programme sellers whisper about men
(Or other subject hardly to be spoken)
The silence of the cave is else unbroken.

* *

In front, the great arch, that the curtain fills,
Gleams from its columns: on the boxes' sills
The rounded Loves shine where they catch the light.
Above, mysterious darkness infinite
Arises tier on tier. A woman stands
Surveying all, with programmes in her hands.

* *

The lights go up, the crowd comes shuffling in.
Under the screen the violins begin
To tune and pluck, the wood-wind groans, musicians
Gossip, drop music, joke and change positions.

* *

The Pit is filled. The Stalls, with sleekness shining,
Come glossy from the groom or suave from dining.
They edge past others to their seats with cringes;
The turn-down seats collapse upon their hinges.
The men smooth hair, the women twitch their shawls.
The Circles focus glasses on the Stalls.

* *

More women enter in, more sleek men follow;
Light, laughter, greetings, chatter, fill the hollow;
The violin-strings tune, the wood-winds groan,
All present act a person not their own
But dreamed of and assumed; attendants glide
Pointing the seats to parties whom they guide.

* *

A man (an actor by his mask-like face)
Stands at a doorway looking on the place;
Those who have recognized him nudge and stare
With "That is he; the tall one, with the hair."

* *

Struggling to's place, a man apologises,
Treading on toes. The safety-curtain rises
Behind, the curtain trembles, fold on fold,
Dim velvet heavy with a fringe of gold.

* *

Now all the thousand watch, while others come
Excitement (that stirs all) makes silent some;
There in the seats whence loudest babbles rise
Some stare in silence and with glistening eyes.

* *

Then in the babble comes the baton's tap,
A hushing follows on a broken clap,
Then, ere the tumult recommences, comes
The pleading of the strings, the march of drums.

* *

Now all are touched in their intensest trait
To battle, or to pardon, or to pray,
Or to exult in love with thoughts of giving
Unworded benediction on all living;
And still the doors are thronged and people press
In, to their seats, and trip on foot or dress.

* *

Now an electric bell its signal burrs,
The music stops, men hush, the brilliance blurs
Into a dimness, then the dimness dies
To darkness, and the voices become eyes.
The fifteen hundred individuals cease
They are an expectation not at peace
But waiting to be shaken; then O, wonder!
The veils of darknesses are drawn asunder,
The scene is bared, O my beloved, look
It is Illyria; listen to the Duke.

—*John Masefield*

The Stones

YOUR hands that seek in my bosom to find what I am
May bruise on the old dark stones, the upper, the nether,
That have been ground and pressed and broken together,
That turned in the night, and made the morning a sham.

Guard your hands. They turned with a heavy moan.
They are silent now. Their grain is the torrent, the mist.
They are old stones. I have forgotten their grist.
They are mossed with the dark. Have done. We will leave them alone.

Trio

CHILDREN come to be born;
Mirth is shattered with sense.
Summer lends passion and scorn
The light of its elements.

So take your kisses, give tears;
Savor the perishing minute
By the grave that you dug, my dears,
Even though I'm not in it.

—*Louise Bogan.*

In An Empty Church

SILENCE, that dream of unheard sound
Streams in my ears, reaches my brain
And fills it, blown immensely clear . . .
Silence, strange peace that none explain,
Long web of undiscerned design,
Man and the God that he has found . . .
Here in this church of old stone saints
And many painted windows, gray
Pigeons tell the silence gently; here
It is secure and still unbroken.
I, too, am silence faintly spoken.
Outlines, lately vivid, fade;
Strong walls crumble; far and near
Converge; and youth and age are one.
Steeped in this silence, unafraid,
I only half recall the drowned
City of pigeons where I live.

Unfaltering, my steady hand
Takes for its compass the firm spire
That lifts its pile into the sun,
And with a clean stroke, draws a line
Down the sky, and down the sky.
Reality has veered. The band
Of golden distance down the skies
Is actual and sharp and fair.
The earth's great ages hang from it like baubles,
Ice, and iron, and bronze, and stone.
Men run down it in dark processions,
Far black figures, crowded, alone.
Their songs float over them, the cries
Undimmed, of their long spent despair
Drift down a sudden windless gust.

My shoes are powdered with the dust of time
That dulls their footfalls. I am on their road.
Who knows that none of them saw bright mirage
Of buried men and still went down in darkness?

Silence, that dream of unheard sound,
That web of unseen line, grows thick like sleep
And stops my ears, my eyes, my brain . . .
Pigeons rebuild a city for me to walk in.

—Carolyn Hall.

First Spring

WHAT is this strange and sentient thing
That is a part of me and you,
And yet of both?
Not Tristran or Iseult could bring
To their awakening such new
And full-blown growth.

There never has been Spring before,
No sword cleft through reality
Nor dream so green.
Eternal Eve, what is there more
Beyond this frail finality
First love can mean?

—Nicholas Kopeloff.

The Measure ☙ *A Journal of Poetry*

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German Poets

Contemporary German Poetry, translated and compiled by Babette Deutsch and Avrahm Yarmolinsky. Harcourt, Brace & Co., New York.

THIS generous anthology of the contemporary German poets opens, as it should, with those fierce youths of the eighties who went about smashing the Dresden dolls of post-Heine acquiescence and prettiness—Liliencron, Holz, Dehmel—plunging into the degradation and squalor of the street, the tenement, the factory; chanting the new gods of Zolaistic naturalism. What an incredible coterie: Liliencron who indulged a peripheral delight in poverty as pretext rather than text for poetry—he was out of pocket often enough—an aristocrat by birth, a soldier by fortune, a horse-dealer and gypsy-follower by preference; Holz who burned with proletarian sympathy and gave us everything from clever little sulphur matches of song to the superb torches of "Phantasus," the gigantic grotesqueries of "Blechschmiede":

Red roses
twine themselves about my dark lance.

Through fields of white lilies
my steed goes snorting.

From jade-green seas
virgins emerge,
slender, unveiled, with rushes in their hair.

I ride, a man of bronze.

Dehmel who cultivated an acute social conscience, dedicated lyrical altars to Sweat, and held the mirror up to Nietzsche.

But our immediate soul is not so much with the forerunners, nor with the symbolists and mystics like Stefan George, Dauthendey, Rilke who abhorred labour problems and social perplexities and found their furious pleasure in oscillating between cadence and decadence, composition and decomposition. We have had our own too recent parallel.

We prefer the younger group: with all their bizarre febrility of technique; all their preoccupation with the unlovely, the sordid, the senescent; all their promethean despairs and pale-mouthed prophecies—they are the valid voices, they are the present Isaiahs. We need not go to such periodicals as "Der Sturm" and "Aktion" for thunder in the index. It is obvious that in a world of chaos you cannot expect much more than a chaos of clear ideas—if any; you must rather expect fragments and incongruities, torsos and truncations; nothing complete, nothing fulfilled, symmetric, sustained. Not even Nero by the most imperturbable bowing could give us andante when the heat was blistering his strad and cracking the strings. A sick hypersensitive spirit, whose fragile nerves, as Ermatinger says of Trakl, are torn by the world "as a spider-web is torn by a stone," revenges himself upon the world by destroying its coherence and undoing its materiality. Therefore the modern German poet makes us pitiless chronicles, the infernal intermezzo of "Aftermath": It is night and

> The river mutters to itself in the darkness
> Like an actor rehearsing his role at night.
> At intervals one hears time's eyelashes flutter.
>
> Meanwhile grey castles slowly fall to ruin.
> Thin, black grasses arise.
> Mountains uplift their white antlers.
>
> Lord, give me a sign that you still live!

It is night and . . .

—*Joseph Auslander.*

O Carolina!

Carolina Chansons, by Du Bose Heyward and Hervey Allen. The *Macmillan Co., New York.*

IN their preface to this book Du Bose Heyward and Hervey Allen remark, "It has been said, perhaps wisely, that the immediate future of American Poetry lies rather in the intimate feeling of local poets who can interpret their own sections to the rest of the country as Robinson and Frost have done so nobly for New England, rather than in the effort to *yawp* universally. Hence there is no attempt here to say, 'O New York, O Pennsylvania,' but simply, 'O Carolina!' "

Whether one agrees with that statement or not, one must admit that these two poets have said "O Carolina!" in tones arresting enough to further endear her to those in other states who care at all for the early picturesqueness of the country as a whole. And this feeling for American tradition is, at the moment, so unfashionable that it endows the book with a kind of perverse originality, not the least of its charms.

However, in spite of the celebration of more or less historical legend—in which much intelligence of selection is shown from what must have been a considerable amount of fascinating material—those particular poems, as poetry, seem to me the least successful. We are told in the preface that, "It should be kept in mind that these poems are impressionistic attempts to present the fleeting feeling of the moment, landscape moods, and the ephemeral attitudes of the past." I feel sorry that the attempts are too impressionistic, and that the past seems too ephemeral. For instance, such a subject as "The Sewees of Sewee Bay" might have been almost anything—even an epic—Mr. Allen has outlined it as faintly as a note-book sketch. On the other hand, Du Bose Heyward, whose "Gamesters All" is strung as tight as anyone could wish, loses intensity when he attempts to elaborate his themes, as in "The Pirates," and "The Last Crew."

But there is much satisfaction in the imaginative response to that so often tattered veil of indefinability—"atmosphere." For this,

Hervey Allen's voice is the richer of the duet. Certain descriptive passages in poems like "From the Book of the Sea Islands," and "Palmetto Town" are fairly soaked with sultry colors. He has too, a fine zest for the fantastic, quite shudderingly displayed in "The Leaping Poll." And I enjoy quoting the whole of "Macabre in Macaws."

> After the hurricane of the late forties,
> Peter Polite says, in the live-oak trees
> Were weird, macabre macaws
> And ash-colored cockatoos, blown oversea
> From Nassau and the West Indies.
> These hopped about like dead men's thoughts
> Among the draggled Spanish moss,
> Preening themselves, all at a loss,
> Mewing faint caws,
> And shrieking from nostalgia—
> With dull screams like a child
> Born with neuralgia—
> And this seems true to me,
> Fitting the landscape's drab grotesquery.

—Winifred Welles.

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Or are you passive? Do you read the modern poets, or do you turn always to the splendid foundation upon which your taste is built? Do you refuse to investigate the creations of today, frightened back into familiar places by the bewildering vista of modern verse? Take heart and step boldly. You are gifted with appreciation above your fellows, and the gift carries its inevitable responsibility.

The trend of modern poetry toward eccentricity on the one hand and banality on the other is the result of your indifference. Poetry—every art—requires a public upon which to live. For every artist, there must be an audience of thousands. In America there is no such public for poetry. So poets write for other poets, like contortionists watching one another perform, expectant of the moment when someone will twist himself into a knot from which even his fellows cannot extricate him. And the self-consciously modern gape and ape. This intellectualizes the art to death. Or they write for the ordinary weeklies and monthlies, where the considerations of space and policy to which their verse must conform, crush the life out of it. It is to the magazines of verse which the poet, demanding freedom of form and imagination, yet respecting his medium, turns naturally for an outlet. Such magazines require for their support a public of poetry lovers.

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